



Funding opportunity

Centre in sustainable and equitable low-carbon living

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) , UK Research and Innovation
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£9,700,000
Award range:	£5,000,000 - £9,700,000
Publication date:	3 February 2023
Opening date:	1 February 2023
Closing date:	17 May 2023 4:00pm UK time

Apply for funding to establish a centre in sustainable and equitable low-carbon living. This centre will be a world-leading centre of excellence carrying out interdisciplinary, cutting-edge and impactful research.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your project can be between £5 million and £9.7 million. UKRI will fund 80% FEC.

Funding is available for up to 5 years.

Who can apply

The principal investigator for this funding opportunity must be based at an organisation eligible for UKRI funding for the duration of the grant.

Eligible organisations are:

- UK higher education institutions (HEI)
- research council institutes
- UKRI-approved independent research organisations
- public sector research establishments
- NHS bodies with research capacity

[Check if your institution is eligible for funding.](#)

This funding opportunity is being administered by ESRC on behalf of UKRI.

Standard ESRC eligibility rules for co-investigators apply.

It is likely that successful applications will be led by experienced researchers who are internationally recognised, with proven ability to deliver a large-scale project successfully and lead an investment of this nature.

The amount of time committed to the grant by the principal investigator and co-investigators must be costed into the proposal, but very small fractions of co-investigator time should be avoided.

Our standard research funding rules apply for staff engaged in more than 1 grant (see [ESRC research funding guide](#), page 26).

Co-investigators and collaborators

International co-investigators can be included in proposals.

Academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) must be from established overseas research organisations of comparable standing to UKRI-eligible UK research organisations to be listed as international co-investigators under this funding opportunity.

Applicants should note [ESRC's policy on the inclusion of international co-investigators](#) on proposals.

International collaboration is not limited to co-investigators but may also involve partnerships to:

- develop international datasets
- promote knowledge exchange and international impact
- enhance research conceptual development on an international scale

We welcome inter-institutional applications and strongly encourage collaboration to fulfil the aims of the centre.

Partnerships are encouraged with non-HEI organisations and across third sector, business and the public sector, either as project partners or as co-investigators.

We will fund all justified costs associated with international co-investigators and co-investigators from UK business, civil society or government bodies at 100% FEC. However, these combined costs must not exceed 30% of the full 100% FEC cost of the grant.

Demand management

Applications to the centre for sustainable and equitable low carbon living competition will not be counted in the demand management measures in place for ESRC's open centres funding opportunity.

Please note that proposals for this centre cannot also be submitted through ESRC's open centres funding opportunity. Applicants submitting the same or a similar proposal to this funding opportunity and the open funding opportunity will be withdrawn from the open funding opportunity.

What we're looking for

About the centre

We are looking for a centre to support the UK's transition to sustainable and equitable low-carbon living.

The centre will bring together the right people, disciplines, institutions and infrastructure to provide the evidence needed for this challenge within a 5-year timeframe.

Population and economic growth over the past century have been unprecedented. The world's population is expected to increase by 2 billion people in the next 30 years. This will put even more pressure on land use, water supply and the demand for currently carbon-intensive services such as energy, transport and housing.

Delivering net zero and adapting to wider environmental change and biodiversity challenges is a policy priority for the UK and devolved administrations and will require major changes in the actions of people, firms, and governments.

The aim of this centre is to enable UK decision makers to identify the most cost-effective and socially feasible options for supporting the public, government, and businesses in transitioning to low-carbon living and adapting to wider environmental change and biodiversity challenges.

Actions to mitigate and adapt to the challenge of climate change will require significant, and often rapid, transformations of lifestyles, business practices, and governance. This includes adopting new low-carbon technologies and using natural resources and services more efficiently, from the food we eat to the way we transport goods.

The centre's leadership team must work with and be responsive to the needs of UK decision makers, with a specific focus on supporting government departments in addressing their evidence needs.

The centre will inform policies and incentive structures that influence the actions of individuals, communities, organisations, and local and national governments in bringing about a lasting shift to more sustainable and equitable low-carbon living

alongside adapting to the impacts of climate change. This will include working to understand:

- the barriers, trade-offs, co-benefits and impacts of different solutions
- what policies, regulations, consumer behaviours, governance, legislation, business models, and standards are needed
- how to leverage complex interacting social and economic processes at all levels (individual behaviours, community action, political and business decisions)

Justice, equity and empowerment will be vital to effective solutions. The centre will consider interventions in the context of the wider impact, co-benefits and potential disadvantages for all people, nature and environments.

A collaborative approach to creating solutions in partnership with a range of stakeholders and across research disciplines that span UKRI's remit is strongly encouraged.

Objectives

The centre's objectives will be to:

- provide rapid advice to decision makers in UK government and industry based on a synthesis of existing evidence
- deliver new, transformative, interdisciplinary, systems-based research to address key evidence gaps
- test interventions on the ground in partnership with local and national stakeholders.
- work with a coalition of partners (including governments, community groups and industry) to co-produce and deliver a programme of activities to implement and scale effective practices
- collaborate and coordinate with new investments within the UKRI 'building a green future' theme (see 'Additional information' section)
- support the development of skills, research capabilities and capacity within the research community. For example, through coaching and mentoring, placements, and fellowships

Outcomes

The centre will have the following short-term outcomes:

- new interdisciplinary research and evidence synthesis that informs policy and spending decisions on, and the adoption of, low-carbon living solutions
- enhanced tools for stakeholders' decision making, particularly government departments, and collaboration in implementing solutions
- catalysing and accelerating collaboration between researchers, government, industry and other stakeholders interested in equitable, low carbon living
- increased capacity and capability of the research community to rapidly generate and disseminate research evidence that helps decision makers understand the relative cost-effectiveness of different interventions and the feasibility of scaling different interventions as part of regional or national rollouts

The anticipated long-term impacts will be for the centre to have enabled tangible progress towards the UK meeting net zero and broader environmental, biodiversity and sustainability goals. This will be achieved through the centre enabling the identification and scaling of new policies, incentive structures and practices, in collaboration with policy makers, businesses and community organisations.

It is recognised that work looking at transitioning to low carbon living and adapting to wider environmental change and biodiversity will have international social, economic and environmental implications. However, the primary focus of this centre should be on supporting UK decision makers to understand the most cost-effective and socially feasible options for supporting the public and businesses in this.

We expect to fund a single centre through this funding opportunity.

Research challenges

Research

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver high-quality, interdisciplinary, internationally-recognised research findings to address unanswered questions about a defined challenge to our society, economy or both.

In this case, you should clearly articulate the challenge that transitioning to sustainable and equitable low-carbon living presents, and how the proposed programme of interdisciplinary research will address this, including any innovative research methods that you intend to develop and use.

Impact

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver significant economic and societal impact, demonstrating that the centre is responding to its specified challenge.

Impact should be a major consideration throughout the scoping of a proposal, and during and beyond the lifetime of a centre.

Impact should be multisectoral, with evidence of engagement with research users relevant to the low-carbon living challenge, such as policymakers, businesses and civil society throughout all stages of the planned timeframe for the award.

Centres should consider other UKRI investments in terms of adding value to their centres, for example maximising opportunities through Impact Acceleration Accounts.

You must include a logic model in your case for support demonstrating the changes your centre will bring about to respond to the challenge, and how and why your programme of research will bring about those changes.

Further resources to support the development of a logic model can be found under 'Supporting documents' in the 'Additional information' section.

Capability

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver the resources needed to become a centre of excellence that adds value to the wider community. This includes developing the people, producing the data and creating the infrastructure needed to respond to the challenge.

Career and skills development

You should clearly articulate your plans for career development.

UKRI is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and the Technician Commitment. Through these UKRI commits to support the professional and career development of researchers and technicians through its funding opportunities. You are encouraged to consider both leadership development and capacity building in your plans.

Leadership development skills should be considered at all career stages to equip researchers in the centre with the leadership skills needed to be able to design, lead and deliver large and complex or interdisciplinary projects and teams.

Research leadership should go beyond project management to include a capacity to enthuse, ignite and sustain an intellectual vision that is inclusive, flexible and open to challenge. The report '[Fit for the future: research leadership matters](#)' gives insight into the skills related to research leadership at different career stages and some preliminary suggestions for how those skills might be supported across the career life-course.

You should also demonstrate how you plan to build capacity among decision makers to use evidence as well as building skills in academia, policy and industry engagement among research staff and technicians at all career levels, from PhD students to early and mid-career academics to established professors.

Up to 3 associated studentships may also be included in this application, for those Doctoral Training Partnerships eligible to receive studentships from 2024.

Data

Centres should maximise the use of relevant existing data resources in the first instance, as well as (where appropriate) producing data that responds to their proposed challenge and is of value to the wider community.

Data collection and management should be in accordance with our [research data policy](#).

UKRI funds a range of data infrastructures that are available and free to use for all bona fide researchers (subject to appropriate data sharing considerations).

Management and structure

You should consider the structure of your proposed centre to ensure it can successfully deliver the objectives of the funding opportunity, whether through a consortium approach or single institution.

The successful centre will be required to partner, collaborate and engage with a wide range of stakeholders and disciplines to agree priorities and deliver key activities.

Partnerships with non-higher education institutions across government, industry and civil society, as well as internationally are encouraged where appropriate.

You must include a brief management plan in your case for support, demonstrating:

- how you will provide leadership across the collaborators involved in the application
- how the management of the centre and its activities will be carried out, including details of project management and administration resource

You should also include details of any advisory group that will be appointed to oversee the development of the centre.

ESRC will work with the appointed centre on their governance arrangements to ensure suitable representation from government departments and representation from the UKRI 'building a green future' theme (see 'Additional information' section).

You are also expected to indicate your plans for monitoring progress against your logic model, and any plans for self-evaluation throughout the lifetime of the award.

The successful centre will be allocated an ESRC investment manager who will work with their centre to agree a monitoring and evaluation plan in the starting phase of the award. This will include submitting quarterly updates on progress to UKRI's 'building a green future' programme board and regular reporting and meetings between ESRC and the centre, for the centre to update ESRC on activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts as well as spend and any key challenges or concerns.

You may propose a title for this centre. Once appointed, the successful applicant will need to have the centre's title approved by the UKRI Building a Green Future Programme Board.

Institutional support

We will be looking for evidence of long-term strategic and financial institutional commitment, to the proposed centre, above the required 20% (as UKRI funds at 80% FEC). This should be through the provision of grant-associated parallel activities. Examples include but are not limited to:

- studentships
- summer schools
- refurbishment of facilities for the centre
- provision of equipment
- administration
- new lectureships

Outline proposals must include an institutional letter of support from the pro-vice chancellor of research (or equivalent role) from the lead organisation that confirms

the research organisation's commitment to the centre application.

If the application is from an existing UKRI investment then this should be noted in the letter of support.

Research ethics

You must ensure that the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard.

You must clearly state how any potential ethical, safeguarding and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place and all risks are minimised before the award commences.

All proposals must comply with the [ESRC framework for research ethics](#).

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Promoting EDI is an integral part of UKRI's vision to deliver new knowledge and an enriched, healthier, more sustainable and resilient society and culture, and to contribute to a more prosperous economy.

You are expected to demonstrate throughout your proposal how you will consider EDI during the centre's lifetime.

Environmental sustainability

UKRI recognises that we must embed environmental sustainability in everything we do.

You are expected to consider the environmental impact of the centre's activities and to put in place actions that encourage sustainability and mitigate any risk of environmental harm.

How to apply

Outline proposals must be submitted to the [Joint Electronic Submission \(Je-S\) system](#) by 17 May 2023 at 4:00pm UK time.

Electronic acknowledgements will be sent to the principal investigator and submitting organisation.

All proposals must be submitted in English or Welsh, costed in pounds sterling using the Je-S system.

Proposals can only be accepted by electronic submission through the Je-S system.

The proposal has 2 elements:

- an online form requesting key information

- a series of mandatory attachments, including:
 - case for support
 - justification of resources
 - institutional letter of support
 - list of key publications
 - CVs for all named individuals

All attachments should be completed offline and uploaded as attachments in Je-S. We recommended uploading attachments as PDF documents.

Generic guidance on the completion of the structured boxes and sections of the form is available from the Je-S help screens, which can be found at the top right-hand corner of each Je-S screen.

You must ensure that you have read and complied with:

- the funding opportunity specific guidance set out in the [Je-S guidance \(PDF, 232KB\)](#)
- the assessment criteria set out in this funding opportunity specification

Where funding opportunity specific guidance provided in these documents differs from generic Je-S help, the funding opportunity specific guidance should always be followed. Care and attention must be given to completing the proposal correctly and complying with all technical requirements. Proposals that are not completed correctly may be rejected by the ESRC office.

The final submission process is the responsibility of the host institution, and we cannot accept responsibility for any delays which may occur. It is recommended that applicants submit in good time before the funding opportunity deadline.

We strongly advise applicants to confirm with their relevant administrator that the proposal has been submitted successfully to ESRC.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

The assessment of applications will be a 2-stage process:

- outline proposal stage
- full proposal stage

Outline proposals will be assessed and shortlisted by an interdisciplinary assessment panel. Shortlisted applicants will subsequently be invited to submit applications to the full proposal stage.

Full proposals will be subject to external peer review and assessed by an interdisciplinary commissioning panel. Shortlisted proposals will be invited to interview. Representatives from the funders will participate in the interview panel.

Representatives from government departments, as a key user group of the evidence generated by the centre, will also be invited to participate in the assessment panel.

Assessment criteria: outline stage

Scientific excellence with impact is the primary criterion and is an essential requirement of all proposals.

All outline proposals will be scored according to ESRC's [scoring scale for panel introducers](#) (page 3).

Proposals which demonstrate that they meet the following criteria are most likely to likely to be invited to apply for the full stage:

- alignment of research programme to the aims and objectives of the funding opportunity
- an innovative, interdisciplinary programme of work which paves the way for the centre to become world-leading in its area of research and have a transformational impact on the challenge of transitioning to sustainable and equitable low-carbon living
- relevant and appropriate disciplinary expertise and non-academic partners to addressing the UK's transition to sustainable and equitable low-carbon living and adapting to wider environmental change and biodiversity challenges. This would include careful consideration of the breadth of disciplinary expertise needed to support the public sector and industry in making green choices
- clearly articulated plans for engaging, collaborating with, and meeting the evidence needs of core audiences, with a particular focus on decision makers in government
- strong plans for impact generation throughout the lifetime of the centre, with evidence of user engagement, backed up by a clear logic model
- clearly articulated plans for people development at all career levels
- demonstration of how the centre will add value to the wider research community
- a robust management structure with a nominated director or directors and clear arrangements for coordination and management of the strategic direction of the centre
- strong institutional commitment with financial support and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining a centre
- evidence that issues relating to equality, diversity, inclusion, risk, ethics and environmental sustainability have been considered throughout the proposal

Contact details

Get help with developing your proposal

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

Ask about this funding opportunity

ESRC Centres Team

Email: esrc.centres@esrc.ukri.org

Additional info

This centre is jointly funded by central funding from UKRI and ESRC.

By working collectively and leveraging new and existing investment and activity, we are harnessing the full power of the UK's research and innovation system to tackle large-scale, complex challenges. This award falls under the umbrella of the UKRI building a green future strategic theme, 1 of 5 UKRI strategic themes identified through our 5-year strategy Transforming Tomorrow Together 2022 to 2027.

The 'building a green future' theme addresses environmental and net zero challenges in all sectors of the economy, including amplifying investments to mitigate greenhouse gas issues and support the adaptation and monitoring of climate change.

Investments made under the 'building a green future' theme are intended to support research and innovation activity across the full breadth of UKRI's remit and are overseen by a cross-UKRI programme board.

The centre is also relevant to priority 1 'net zero, environment, biodiversity and climate change' of the [ESRC 2022 to 2025 delivery plan](#), which sets out our commitment to invest in ambitious new interdisciplinary programmes on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Funding Service

The full proposal stage of this funding opportunity is likely to run on [our new funding platform, the UKRI Funding Service](#), rather than via the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system.

[Set up an account on the Funding Service.](#)

If successful at the outline stage, you will be invited to submit a full application, and will receive guidance at that point.

The Funding Service has a digital form-based format with sections addressing application questions which are the assessment criteria for the funding opportunity.

Supporting documents

[Je-S guidance \(PDF, 232KB\)](#)

[Equality impact assessment \(PDF, 346KB\)](#)

Timeline

- **1 February 2023**
Outline opening date
- **17 May 2023 4:00pm**
Outline closing date
- **July 2023**
Full stage opening date
- **November 2023**
Full stage closing date
- **April 2024**
Interviews
- **October 2024**
Awards commence

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)